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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003914

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STATE FOR PM, S/CT, AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 15 UPDATE ON JOLO OPERATIONS

REF: A. MANILA 3790
[1](#)B. MANILA 3670
[1](#)C. MANILA 3560
[1](#)D. MANILA 3401
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[1](#)G. MANILA 3218
[1](#)H. MANILA 1396

Classified By: (U) Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/REL AUS) SUMMARY. The Armed Force of the Philippines (AFP) is showing no let-up in its seven-week old effort to capture or kill the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist leadership on the island of Jolo. While the operation is far from over, the Filipino military can point to several "success stories" so far, including effective joint operations, improved re-supply, better combat leadership, and improved use of intelligence. USAID assistance and Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines civil military operations with the AFP before the start of the campaign helped separate terrorists from the population and diminish support for their cause. We believe that the AFP will ultimately emerge from "Operation Ultimatum" as a more capable force. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) campaign to capture or kill the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) leadership on the island of Jolo is now in its seventh week, with the AFP showing no sign of giving up its relentless pursuit of the terrorists. The AFP currently has 6,000 troops on the island, including a Special Forces battalion.

[1](#)3. (S/REL AUS/PHIL) Although press reports continue to speculate that the terrorists have either been killed or escaped by sea, we have a high degree of confidence that they remain on Jolo. According to the latest AFP information, ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani and JI operatives Dulmatin and Umar Patek are in the vicinity of Luuk in southeast Jolo, an area in which Janjalani has family ties and where Dulmatin initially found sanctuary when he arrived on the island in November 2005. The ASG's Abu Solaiman is thought to be still in or near Jolo City, while there are unconfirmed reports that ASG sub-commander Radulan Sahiron has moved toward the coast in south central Jolo. The Philippine Navy, with U.S. intelligence and surveillance support, is maintaining a close maritime blockade around the island, and has stopped and

searched 1604 vessels since the August 1 start of "Operation Ultimatum."

14. (C/REL AUS) Throughout the last several weeks, the AFP has demonstrated tenacity and dogged willingness to track the terrorists. It has kept its troops in the field and engaged in a series of aggressive patrols, raids, and attacks. Although bloodied on several occasions in contacts with the enemy, most notably on September 4 when a Philippine Marine Force Reconnaissance platoon suffered six dead and 21 wounded in close quarter combat with a larger ASG force, the AFP has continued to take the fight to the terrorists. While the operation is far from over, we would cite several "success stories" already:

-- Effective Joint Operations: Since the pre-dawn amphibious assault on August 1, AFP Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine units have shown they have the ability to coordinate and successfully conduct joint actions. In one operation, a U.S.-trained Light Reaction Company sniper in a Philippine Air Force helicopter disabled a fleeing ASG vessel and forced the terrorists to abandon it.

-- Re-supply of Troops in the Field and Ships at Sea: Unlike previous operations, the AFP has managed to re-supply its troops in the field and its ships at sea. Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) and Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) personnel have worked closely with their AFP counterparts to identify blockages in the supply train and move food, ammunition, medicine, and other supplies down to the units that need them. Joint Task Force 515 and JSOTF-P have assisted the Philippine Navy with critical maintenance of its patrol

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vessels that has helped keep the maritime cordon intact.

-- Aggressive Combat Leadership: BG Raphael, the Task Force Comet Commander on Jolo, and MG Cedo, the Western Mindanao Commander, have demonstrated aggressive leadership. Both officers are highly receptive to input from JSOTF-P advisors and have embraced rapid planning principles. All major AFP maneuver elements and command staffs include a JSOTF-P liaison team and have proven ready to accept U.S. advice.

-- Disruption of Terrorist Operations: The AFP forced the JI and ASG out of a well-entrenched base camp that included a sophisticated bomb-making factory (see septel), successfully disrupting what was apparently a series of bombings intended to produce mass civilian casualties.

-- Better Use of Intelligence: US-supplied intelligence is now integrated into and helping to shape AFP planning. From Chief of Staff Esperon on down, the AFP appears to have begun to accept the doctrine that "intelligence drives operations."

-- Improved Training: Before the start of operations, JSOTF-P personnel engaged in a series of subject matter expert exchanges, including live fire, that exponentially increased combat efficiency at the squad and platoon level. Coupled with earlier security assistance training of the Light Infantry Battalions and Light Reaction Companies, these exchanges have resulted in improved performance and confidence in the field and in combat.

-- Enhanced Medical Support: Improved combat lifesaver and casualty evacuation training honed during bilateral training events, like Joint Combined Exercises for Training, Security Assistance Mobile Training Teams, and other exercises with U.S. counterparts have contributed to this increased combat confidence. Backed up by U.S. medical evacuation support, the AFP has shown a greater capability to get its casualties more quickly from the battlefield to the hospital.

15. (C/REL AUS) Underlying all this was the intensive civil military operations campaign begun with JSOTF help in January

2006, and boosted by Balikatan and the visit of the USNS MERCY, which helped separate the terrorists from the population and diminish support for their cause. Closely linked to the over \$4 million annual USAID infrastructure, health, education, and renewable energy projects, the series of medical, engineering, dental, and veterinary missions did much to convince the population to stay neutral during the present fighting. The AFP has been able to operate in previously denied areas, and a number of civil volunteer organizations are actively cooperating in the hunt for the terrorists.

16. (C/REL AUS) A media outreach effort, launched conjointly with the civil military operations campaign, contributed to building the legitimacy of and confidence in the AFP and to diminish fears of the American presence on Jolo. AFP officers openly state that U.S. forces are providing intelligence and other assistance to their operation -- a far cry from their previous hesitation to admit any U.S. role, or to refer to U.S. assistance as an "exercise."

17. (C/REL AUS) "Operation Ultimatum" is far from over. However, we believe that the new, more confident AFP we are seeing will emerge from the operation more capable of fighting the much longer war on terrorism in the Philippines.

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